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MEMORANDUM  
DECLASSIFIED BY/RELEASE AUTHORITY:  
RICHARD ZORN, SENIOR REVIEWER  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
RELEASE DECISION: RELEASE IN FULL  
DATE: JANUARY 28, 2020

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

May 7, 1968

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## MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Luncheon Conversation with Soviet Embassy Official

I had lunch today with Yuri Tcherniakov, Minister Counselor of the Soviet Embassy, at his invitation.

Tcherniakov opened with the remark that "favorable winds seem to be blowing" in Soviet-American relations. He referred to the Consular Convention. I inquired whether the Soviets expect to advise us of ratification through official channels, and Tcherniakov remarked that the Embassy had raised this question with Moscow and expected to hear soon. When I noted that this was the first bilateral treaty between us, Tcherniakov said: "How about the fishing agreements?" I said I believed they did not require ratification, and Tcherniakov said that, nevertheless, they were important -- as was our whole relationship in this field.

Vietnam

Tcherniakov remarked that the agreement to talk in Paris was a highly favorable development. He asked me what I thought of the prospects. I remarked that I was a pessimist in my head, and an optimist in my heart.

Tcherniakov launched into a discussion of the advantages of setting up a coalition government in South Vietnam. He said he thought we ought to be working for a government with ten neutral, uncommitted men in the middle and five "extremists" on either side. I asked Tcherniakov whom he had in mind for the neutralists in the middle. The only name he offered was Dzu. I remarked that he sounded as if he were advocating a new Laos settlement, adding that I thought the Communists had pulled out of the trilateral arrangement almost immediately, retaining great areas of the country under their control. Tcherniakov acknowledged that a Laos-type settlement was what he had in mind, and complained that rightist generals in Vientiane had contributed to the breakdown of the coalition government. He said both the Soviet Union and the U.S. should have given stronger and more decisive support to Souvanna Phouma.

I asked Tcherniakov what his attitude was toward supervised and safeguarded elections. He said that Asian pride would not allow them to permit a bunch of European white people to supervise their affairs. I observed that the principal executive officer of the United Nations was a Burmese, and there were Indians and a lot of other people around who are hardly European white people.

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Tcherniakov said he thought our attitude toward the new Alliance had been unduly negative. I remarked that it could perhaps be described as a front for the Front. Tcherniakov said that perhaps the solution would have to come through negotiations between Saigon and the NLF, via some sort of intermediary. He said we should bear in mind that China had not been pleased with Hanoi's agreement to talk, and was hoping the talks would fail. He said we should bear in mind that there were factions in both Hanoi and the NLF, and failure of the talks would encourage the extremists.

I remarked that the other side should bear in mind that President Johnson was in a position of extraordinary strength and freedom during these months, a situation which his successor might not enjoy -- as he would have to live with the political fall-out from any settlement or accommodation for his entire period of office. Therefore, the other side should realize the opportunity it now has to reach a viable settlement.

### The NPT

Tcherniakov said the signing of the NPT would be a great event when it came -- as the treaty is of overriding importance. I inquired where and at what level he thought the signing would be. Tcherniakov said he thought his government wanted Geneva, and "a suitably high level."

Tcherniakov expressed concern about the intentions of the Federal Republic of Germany -- saying that he was afraid that the Federal Republic might refuse to sign at the last moment. He went on to say that there was a suspicion in Soviet circles that Bonn might try to blackmail the Russians, trading off an NPT signature for other interests in Germany and Berlin. He found the comments of officers of the State Department about the NPT and Berlin very worrisome.

I remarked that Bonn was hardly trying to blackmail anybody, as the initiative for the recent troubles in Berlin had come from the East Germans. Tcherniakov said he thought it had been provocative to send the Minister of Interior to Berlin to deal with the Dutschke aftermath, and East German action against Schuetz had been strictly because he was at that moment Acting President of the Federal Republic. I said that, surely, Bonn Cabinet ministers -- including the Minister of Interior -- had travelled to Berlin before on official business. We both knew that, whenever the status quo is upset, there is trouble.

Tcherniakov asked whether we still hoped to sign the NPT this year. I said that the President had said in his State of the Union message that he not only hoped to sign the NPT, but also hoped to send it forward to this session of the Congress. So far as I knew, this desire of the President had not changed.

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Bilateral Issues

Tcherniakov said that agreement on intermediate stops under the Civil Air Agreement was welcome -- and guessed that service would start in June. On the Exchange Agreement negotiations, he said he expected talks to start this month -- with May 20 his recollection of the probable date.

Tcherniakov mentioned the customs incident at the time of the arrival of Kuznetsov's plane. He expressed understanding that the custom officials had gone further than intended, and remarked that Dobrynin had never seen Kuznetsov madder than he had been that day -- but that Kuznetsov had quite gotten over it when he came down to Washington two or three days later.

Tcherniakov said we were lucky this incident had not caused a serious problem. I remarked that the best way to handle these things was to avoid difficulties on both sides and in both countries.

I said the Borisov incident had been unfortunate. Tcherniakov remarked that the military lived in a world of their own. I said that might be so, but that the troubles such incidents cause could easily slosh over into a broader context. One sometime had the feeling, I said, of being like the Red Queen -- running as fast as you can not to go backward.

Tcherniakov ended on an optimistic note, saying that the NPT and a successful outcome in Paris could mean that this Administration had laid a foundation for future cooperation for years to come between the two super-powers. I remarked that I knew the President had a deep sense of the importance of the relationship between the Soviet Union and the U.S.

Nathaniel Davis

cc: Mr. Rostow/Mr. Smith  
Mr. Ash  
S/S - State  
Mr. Lisle, EUR/EE

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